

Washing of a male Splendid Fairy-wren by a female – At our cottage in Denmark we have a bird bath set in remnant natural bush, the habitat of many birds including a colony of Splendid Fairy-wrens *Malurus spendens*.

In the warm weather the bird bath is a popular sport for all the birds such as Honeyeaters, Twenty-eight Parrots, Red-capped Parrots, Western Rosellas, Grey Fantails as well as the wrens.

It was noted that only the female wrens used the bath. After each dip, instead of preening in the vicinity as other birds did they would fly into secluded patches of scrub. The answer to their flit into the scrub came on 1 February 1996, when my wife and I watched a male wren being “washed” by a female. The female would splash into the bird bath then fly very “soggily” to the male, where she would snuggle up to him and energetically fluff her wet feathers and shake water droplets onto him. The male then preened himself. The washing operation was repeated two more times.

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Brahminy Kite on the Swan River
– When walking my dog along Freshwater Bay foreshore early on 13 February 1997, I was very surprised to see a Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*) perched on the very top of a tall Norfolk Island Pine growing near the base of the Claremont Jetty. The most southerly locality for this bird

given in the *Atlas of Australian Birds* is Shark Bay, and some readers (particularly those with little experience of the Kite) may doubt this record, based as it is on a single sighting. However, the bird's call and the chestnut plumage and white head gleaming in the sunlight left no room for uncertainty.

I first met the Brahminy Kite (then known generally as the Red-backed Sea-eagle) on the Ord River in 1944, when Kites and Ospreys were seen patrolling Carlton Reach – now inundated by Lake Kununurra. In later years, I have seen the Brahminy Kite frequently at Broome and in South East Asia, the most recent occasion being off Changi Beach, Singapore, a month earlier than the Swan River sighting.

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Red-tailed Black Cockatoo Feeding on Berries of Cape Lilac – During the latter part of July 1996 while visiting Merredin, I noticed that the Red-tailed Black Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus banksii* was feeding on berries of Cape Lilacs *Melia azedarach* growing in the housing areas of the town.

The trees were devoid of foliage at the time and the birds were plucking the berries from their stems, slicing through the flesh and splitting the seed capsule longitudinally, extracting the seeds and then dropping the flesh, split capsule and skin onto the ground. Some of the berries dropped were split into two parts but most of those discarded were

still joined at the stem by the skin. A few of the discarded berries still retained a seed or two and the ground under the trees was littered with the split and discarded berries.

During the first few weeks of August I continued to observe the cockatoos feeding on the Cape Lilac trees and I noticed that the cockatoos were not feeding at random on them. They had by now stripped the berries from the top branches of the trees and had begun to choose the berries from the lower branches and were in the process of stripping these completely. This seemed to apply generally to all the Cape Lilac trees.

The birds had obviously been feeding on the berries for some time prior to my visit and local resident Jerry Driver confirmed that the birds had been present in the town for some time. The largest number of birds in any one flock was 20 but small groups of three or so were commonly seen. I was reluctant to estimate the number of birds present in Merredin because observations by me in south-west Jarrah *Eucalyptus marginata* forests showed that the birds begin the day in one large flock and then progressively split into smaller

flocks and groups as the day progresses. Conversely, towards evening the birds again form into one large flock. If this formula can be applied to the cockatoos in Merredin, then it is possible that only the same 20 birds counted may have been frequenting Merredin.

During my return to Merredin on 16 September, I noticed that the berries from the lowest branches had also been stripped from the trees and over the three days that I was there, only one small group of birds was seen.

The seeds of the Cape Lilac berries, though very small, are another introduced food for this cockatoo in the wheatbelt, another being the introduced Double-gee *Emex australis* which in the northern South-West Region may form up to 99% of its diet (Blakers *et al.* 1984). One wonders if the birds have been forced onto this diet from introduced plants because of a shortage of natural foods.

One or two Port Lincoln Parrots *Platycercus zonarius* may also feed on the berries of the Cape Lilac and I have observed this both at Merredin in recent years and over several years at Hall's Head, Mandurah.

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